

Castlemaine Naturalist

October 2020

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Monthly newsletter of the
Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.



Brown Tree Frog, *Litoria ewingii*
Photo by Euan Moore

A Journey to Bhutan - Giles Daubeney and Nina Tsilikas

At our September webinar, we were treated to an exciting armchair journey to Bhutan, presented by club members Giles and Nina who travelled there in May 2019.

Bhutan is a small country, about the size of Switzerland, situated in the eastern Himalaya range where it is sandwiched between the two giants, India and China. The country has been protected by its isolation, extremely rugged and largely forested mountains and low population (around 800,000). The Bhutanese have actively maintained their isolation from the outside world with international tourism only starting within the last fifty years and the number of entry visas limited. This has meant that the country has generally avoided the worst excesses of rampant tourism. The local population is keen to see limits on tourist numbers kept in place as they can see the impacts of excessive tourism in the areas close to the Indian border where there are few restrictions on local tourism from India.

Bhutan is about 70% forested with about 60% of the forested area protected by the constitution. There is one national park which encompasses about 10% of the country. Natural areas cover an altitudinal range from around 300m near the southern border with India to over 7,500m on the highest peaks. The mountainous landscape naturally limits the extent of agriculture to small areas on the valley floors and small pockets of less steep land elsewhere.



Jigme Dorji NP, Punakha (photo by Giles Daubeney)

Giles and Nina travelled through Bhutan with a small-group birding tour run by a local Bhutanese company. Over about three weeks, their tour took them from the south-east of the country at a land border with India along the main highway (the only road)

through the centre to the capital Thimphu, and on to the small international airport from where they flew out.

They showed us some of their stunning photographs of the more noteworthy birds such as the Rufous-necked and Great Hornbills, Woodpeckers (there are 16 species in Bhutan ranging from the Weebill-sized White-browed Piculet to the Currawong-sized Great Slaty Woodpecker, the largest Woodpecker in Asia), Maroon Oriole, Nuthatches, Yuhinas (cute relatives of the Silvereye with prominent triangular crests) and many other groups that have a distribution centred on east Asia. There were also photos of owls and raptors, both groups that are often hard to see in heavily forested and mountainous country.



Whiskered Yuhina (*photo by Giles Daubeney*)



Blood Pheasant (*photo by Nina Tsilikas*)

South and east Asia is well known for its pheasants and allies. The males often have spectacular plumage (e.g. Peacock or Red Junglefowl, the ancestor of the domestic Bantam), while the females tend to be a mottled brown which provides camouflage on the forest floor. Giles showed us photos of the spectacular Satyr Tragopan with its white-spangled brick-red neck and breast, and the Himalayan Monal, which is a grouse-shaped bird with an electric blue back and head, chestnut neck and tail, and black breast.

As the altitude changed the forest changed, from lowland sub-tropical forest through evergreen oaks and relatives to pine forests at the higher altitudes. The highest altitude forests were of Rhododendron species that were in flower at the time when Giles and Nina were there. With the changes in forest type there were changes in the bird species. In all about 270 of Bhutan's 600 plus species were seen along the way.

We were also treated to a glimpse of other wildlife seen in Bhutan. There were several species of monkey, in particular, Golden, Capped and Gray Langurs, as well as the Black Giant Squirrel, Pikas (small tail-less rodents related to rabbits and hares) and ungulates such as Barking Deer and



Black Giant Squirrel (*photo by Nina Tsilikas*)

Himalayan Brown Goral. The latter is a relative of sheep and goats which lives on steep rock faces and bluffs. There were also plenty of butterflies and other invertebrates. Some of the butterflies appeared to be closely related to the tropical Australian species such as the Blue Tiger and the black and white Plane Butterflies of Cape York.



Leaf Butterfly (*photo by Nina Tsilikas*)

The roads were a feature of the presentation, with photos and a graphic video showing narrow roads carved into steep hillsides hundreds of meters above the valley. The narrow roads with tight corners and no barriers limited the size of vehicles to about the size of a 20-seat bus or small truck and kept the speed of travel down to about 30kph. As to be expected in a country with steep mountains and heavy seasonal rainfall, washouts and slips across the roads are common.

Giles and Nina also gave us a glimpse of the culture of Bhutan. We saw pictures of the people going about daily life and showing their traditional dress and of the food, largely vegetarian in line with the dominant Buddhist culture, and some of the monasteries and shrines. The towns were relatively low-rise, even in the capital Thimphu, where buildings were a maximum of six floors. Construction materials such as timber and rock are sourced locally. Gravel for concrete is obtained from local river-beds. There are strict limits on the quantities of building materials that may be obtained to ensure that environmental damage is minimised and that the forest industry is truly sustainable. That these policies are working was demonstrated by the presence of breeding Ibisbill (a large plover-like bird with a down-curved bill) in a river-bed in Thimphu.

Thank you Giles and Nina for an enthralling and informative talk. A place for the bucket-list when international travel resumes!

Euan Moore

ANGAIR's Spring Nature Show: 7 Sept-11 Oct

Many of you may be familiar with the annual Spring Nature Show organised by the Anglesea and Aireys Inlet Society for the Protection of Flora and Fauna (ANGAIR). This year due to COVID-19 restrictions, the group has established the [ANGAIR Nature Show website](#) so that all can continue to enjoy and discover the area's flora and fauna. The site contains a variety of resources including information on indigenous plants as well as weeds and their control. There are also links to several **self-guided walks**. For each walk there is a map with descriptive notes, but also a collection of beautiful photos of the wildflowers and birds that may be seen on the walk to enjoy either in person (if you are able to travel there) or on-line. Some of the walks are even available as **videos**!



October CFNC webinars – see page 12 for joining details

Fri Oct 9: Dr Greg Kerr, Nature Glenelg Trust

Plugging a Gap: Restoring Wetlands in SW Victoria and SE SA

The wetlands of SW Victoria and SE South Australia have been extensively drained and modified over the last 150 years. Drainage, groundwater extraction, irrigation and cropping have all combined to alter a predominantly wet landscape to one where most wetlands either disappeared or became severely degraded. Farmers and other land holders are now realising they or their predecessors went too far in draining the wetlands and that many of these drained lands are rarely productive.

Dr Greg Kerr, Senior Ecologist, Nature Glenelg Trust, will tell an inspiring story of how resilience, patience and cooperation between the NGT, community groups and the local Catchment Management Authority is successfully restoring over 40 wetlands of the Wannon River Delta, a 13km² wetland complex at the base of the Grampians, into healthy productive wetlands with positive consequences for biodiversity.



Enjoying sunset at a restored and evolving Walker Swamp

Wed Oct 14: Tanya Loos - Joint CFNC-Birdlife Castlemaine District meeting



Join **Tanya Loos**, BirdLife Australia, on a walk through Australia's largest annual bird count – **the Aussie Backyard Bird Count**. Now in its 7th year, this event is especially catered to the beginner birdwatcher. Tanya will discuss how to get involved, how the count relates to BirdLife Australia's conservation and advocacy work, and finally some tips on bird identification and FAQ.

A bit more about the count: Held between **19–25 October**, the Aussie Backyard Bird Count is a great way to connect with the birds in your backyard, no matter where your backyard happens to be. You can count in a suburban backyard, a local park, a patch of forest, down by the beach, or the main street of town. In fact, you don't even have to leave home, making it the ultimate COVID-safe activity!

Last year's count revealed a distinct southward trend of birds such as White-winged Triller and Crimson Chat, due to an irruption of dry country species into Vic.

<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/rarely-seen-birds-flock-to-victorian-oases-as-drought-s-grip-tightens-20191106-p537zb.html>

Challenge Bird Count: 2019 summary and 2020 cancellation – by Chris Timewell

For ~19 years, the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club has participated in the Challenge Bird Count. On one day in the first weekend in December each year, groups from across Australia aim to detect as many bird species as possible within a 25km radius of a designated central point. For the Castlemaine area, the Market Building is considered to be our central point.

Unfortunately, the CFNC's twentieth participation will need to wait until the year 2021. This event has been cancelled in 2020 due to the COVID pandemic and its associated restrictions and risks.

The findings of the six teams comprising the CFNC group in 2019 were described in detail within the March 2020 issue of the Castlemaine Naturalist. All of the sightings made by Castlemaine teams were entered into Birddata, thereby making an additional significant contribution to bird conservation and knowledge. Birddata is the repository of bird sightings from across Australia.

We recently received the detailed national results of the Challenge Count from 2019. A summary is provided in the table below.

Region	# of groups	# of bird species detected	# of individual birds
Greater Melbourne	3	144	6,526
Country Victoria	11	261	72,011
NSW	4	163	6,351
Queensland	5	249	21,470
External Territories	2	37	2125
TOTAL	25	392	108,483

This is almost certainly the first time that external territories have participated, with results received from Christmas Island and Cocos Keeling Islands. As such, there were 14 birds recorded in 2019 that had never been detected previously during the many decades of the annual challenge bird count (e.g. Christmas Island Imperial Pigeon, Javan Pond Heron).

Most of the bird species detected by Castlemaine were also detected by other groups elsewhere in Victoria or interstate. However, Castlemaine was the only one of the 11 Country Victorian groups to have White-throated Needletail, Black-eared Cuckoo or Powerful Owl on their list, and one of only two groups to have Fuscous Honeyeater and White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike. Indeed, no other group in the country detected Powerful Owl or Black-eared Cuckoo.

Many thanks to the coordinators of this national event: the volunteer representatives from BirdLife Australia (Adriana Bianchi and David Ap-Thomas). Looking forward to having you all involved again in 2021.

Observations

Kerrie Jennings

Birding on the farm

We've had irregular visits from White-bellied Sea-eagles for many years now on our farm at Baringhup. Perhaps they are part of the Cairn Curran group that Geoff Park writes about. Once our son Ben found a bird with "massive feet" dead on an irrigation bay, most likely having collided with the power lines above. Still in good condition and with support from Chris Timewell we bundled the bird up and sent it to the Melbourne Museum where it now is a "skin" for research purposes.

Things were quiet for a few years after that until their somewhat recent return. WBSE's have been spotted surveying the landscape from tall trees and gliding above our "big dam" and lambing ewes. Recently (02/09/20) Robert and I were helping a ewe to lamb close to the Loddon River when we heard an unusual and loud noise approaching above the treetops. Louder and louder it became until two adult WBSE's came into view just above the River Red Gums, flying downstream and directly above us, hotly pursued by two Australian Magpies. Their loud calls are described in Pizzey & Knight as "far-carrying metallic clanking"; we'd never heard this call before.



White-bellied Sea Eagle
(photo by Jacqui Jennings)

Platypus on the farm

Over the years we've sighted both Platypus and Rakali along our section of the river at Baringhup. When CFN were to have Jeff Williams as a speaker I was quite excited, and also a bit concerned that we hadn't sighted either for a while. Imagine my delight to see not one but two Platypus while on my evening walk along the Loddon River (31/08/20) shortly after the CFN platypus presentation. I'd quietly sat on the bank at a narrow section of the river for just a couple of minutes when I noticed movement in the water. They were so close, paddling around together, diving and surfacing seemingly oblivious or unconcerned by my presence.



Platypus (photo by John Bundock)

Damian Kelly

Encounters with robins (*all photos by Damian Kelly*)

Just prior to the second lock-down, I spent some time wandering and sitting at Rise and Shine. Resting quietly with my back against an old eucalyptus, the birds came to me. I have always found that edge habitat is a useful place to sit and watch. And so it was with the fence line at the back of Rise and Shine.

A pair of **Jacky Winters** (right) spent most of the time hawking for insects from a vantage point along the fence, rapidly flitting down to the ground, grabbing a tasty morsel and heading back to their perch to eat it.

Further along the fence a small group of **Flame Robins** (below), surely the last of the season, were also using the fence as a lookout before heading down for food. Unlike the Jacky Winters, which kept entirely to the grassy area, the Flame Robins alternated between the grass and the wood litter and logs inside the fence line.



Jacky Winter about to launch



A male Flame Robin – really stands out in the field



A male Hooded Robin

To me the male Hooded Robin (above right) is a beautiful bird – none of the showy reds of the others robins, but rather an understated beauty. Not often seen around these parts, but worth it when you do see it.

Female Scarlet Robin (right) – in characteristic pose as she watches and waits for an insect on the ground, ready to pounce. She kept away from the fence line, preferring the low shrubby bushes instead.

A pair of **Eastern Yellow Robins** (below) seemed to be having a bit of a squabble. I suspect there was a nest nearby. They were displaying quite aggressive behaviour towards the Scarlet Robins, chasing them away at every opportunity.



Willy Wagtail launching an attack on a Hooded Robin

Also involved in territorial behaviour, this **Willy Wagtail** (above right) chased away the Hooded Robin. Didn't seem to care about nearby Flame Robins, but was determined to hassle the Hooded male. Something to do with colour? Who Knows?

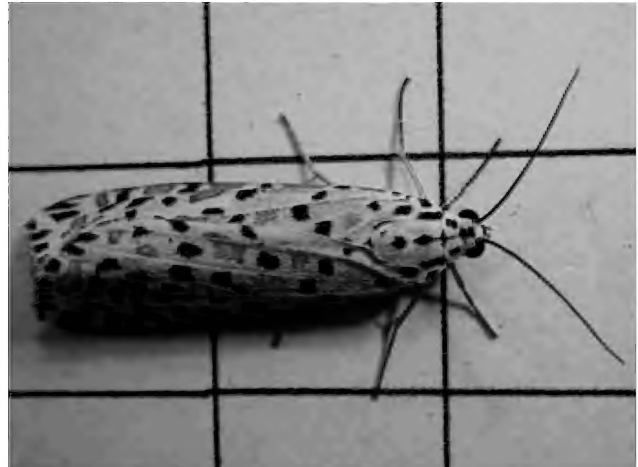
Nigel Harland - Birds of Sutton Grange September 2020

Superb Fairywren	Red-browed Finch	White-browed Scrubwren
New Holland Honeyeater	Yellow-tufted Honeyeater	Yellow-faced Honeyeater
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Long-billed Corella	Red Wattlebird
Australian Magpie	Crimson Rosella	Welcome Swallow
Australian Raven	Striated Pardalote	Fan-tailed Cuckoo
Laughing Kookaburra	Spotted Pardalote	Rufous Whistler

Jill Williams



Scorpion - *Lychas marmoreus*



Moth – either *Utetheisa lotrix* - the Salt & Pepper moth or *Utetheisa pulchelloides* - the Heliotrope moth

The scorpion is a regular visitor crawling across our floor. The moth was attracted to the lights on our veranda. The grid is 1cm squares. (Photos by Jill Williams).

Noel Young

A closer look at Sundews

Wandering about our dry bushlands, one can't help but notice the wide abundance of *Drosera* species, generally accompanied by mosses and plant varieties that can thrive or at least survive on the depleted soils that are a legacy of the gold rush. These carnivorous plants obtain the nutrition that is lacking in the soil by trapping hapless insects on sticky stalks and secrete enzymes to consume them.

Given their abundance, I often wonder about the overall impact Sundews may be having on our apparently depleted insect population. Even so, they are part of an ecosystem along with other opportunistic insect eaters like birds, bats and spiders, which has been more or less stable for many years.



Scented Sundew, *Drosera abberans*.
Dark specs on the leaves appear to be the remains of tiny insect carcasses.
(Photo by Noel Young)

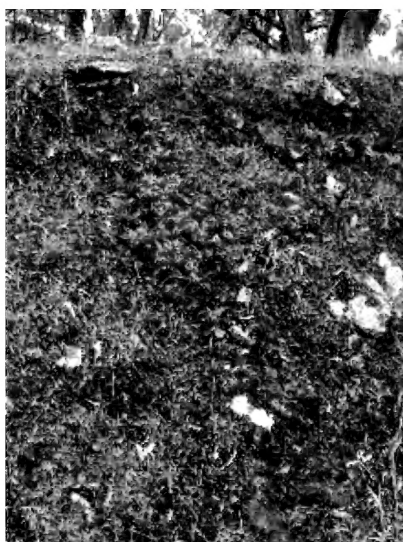


A tiny fly caught in the tentacles of a Tall Sundew, *Drosera auriculata*.
(Photo by Noel Young)

Judy and Phil Hopley - Maldon Historic Reserve



Waxlip Orchid,
Glossodia major



Hardenbergia violacea



Creamy Candles,
Stackhousia monogyna



Bulbine Lily,
Bulbine bulbosa



Murnong Yam Daisy,
Microseris walteri



Blunt Greenhood,
Pterostylis curta



Running Postman, *Kennedia prostrata*



Twining Fringe-lily, *Thysanotus patersonii*

Cathrine Harboe-Ree - Kalimna Park



Golden Moths, *Diuris chryseopsis*



Nodding Greenhoods, *Pterostylis nutans*



Leopard Orchid, *Diuris pardina*

Wildflowers Wanders

Our usual program of Wednesday afternoon Wildflower Wanders during spring cannot occur while COVID-19 restrictions continue – yet another disappointing impact of the virus. Your Committee suggests that members whose walks for exercise are through areas where wildflowers are emerging as spring unfolds, note the species that are flowering, with a photo where possible (thank you to this month's contributors!). Repeating this on a weekly or fortnightly basis along the same route will provide an interesting record of this season, after good winter rain. Short reports on these observations with photos of special sightings will be welcomed by our Newsletter's editors: email to newsletter.cfnc@gmail.com.



Pink Fingers, *Caladenia carnea*
Photo by Cathrine Harboe-Ree

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club

COMING EVENTS

Monthly meetings are being held on-line via Zoom during the coronavirus pandemic, commencing at 7.30pm.

If you have registered for our previous sessions, you will be sent the link for registering with Zoom. If you have not joined earlier webinars and wish to attend, please email Peter Turner at munrods1@iinet.net.au

The main speaker will follow the usual 'observations' session where members can share recent interesting sightings (with an option to show a photo using the Zoom 'share screen' option (if unfamiliar with this, please ask Peter for advice)).

Friday Oct 9: DR GREG KERR – Plugging a Gap: Restoring Wetlands in the SW of Victoria and SE SA. See talk introduction on page 4.

Wednesday Oct 14: TANYA LOOS – Birdlife Australia's 'Birds in Backyards' program. A CFNC/BirdLife Castlemaine District Joint meeting. See page 4.

Friday Nov 13: DR NOUSHKA REITER - Conservation of Threatened Orchids

Monday Nov 16: ROADSIDE CLEAN-UP – details in next Newsletter.

Friday Dec 11: MEMBERS' NIGHT

2020 COMMITTEE

President:	Vacant	
Vice-President:	Dianne Thomson	
Secretary:	Peter Turner	5470 6891
Treasurer:	Geoff Harris	0418 392 183
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	Euan Moore	0407 519 091
	Richard Piesse	0448 572 867

Club website (Webmaster: Ron Wescott) <http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/>

MEMBERSHIP

Membership forms (available from the CFNC website) can be mailed with cheque to the Treasurer, or completed with details of direct payment into the CFNC account (details on the renewal form), or scanned and mailed or emailed to castlemainefnc@hotmail.com

Subscriptions for 2020

Ordinary membership: Single \$35, Family \$50

Pensioner or student: Single \$25, Family \$30

Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

NEWSLETTER

Deadline for the November "Castlemaine Naturalist": **30th October**

Email newsletter material to: newsletter.cfnc@gmail.com

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